

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

(Continued from page one)

Somewhere I have seen it explained that people turn to the life of Jesus for the direction of their lives just as sailors turn to the mariner's compass for their direction — because it steadily points one way. You can adjust yourself to it because you know it does not swerve. It may be dark about you and the storm may rage, but you hold your little lantern to that needle, sure that it will be true — the sign of stability in the midst of storm. And so today, with all the special privileges and blessings of American life, certainly its one peculiar evil is its restless, unpeaceful way of living, and the teaching of Jesus Christ is that this activity should be controlled and directed. This restlessness with all its attendant nervous disorders is better than stagnation, but it is pathetic to see a speed without purpose, a hurrying, scrambling, rushing, to no end.

Into this busy life Jesus Christ comes at this Christmas season to teach us not to retreat and run away to a quiet place in order to find our peace, but to give it all a purpose and meaning. He would have us say, "I do not expect to live my days in a sheltered place, away from life's problems and difficulties. I expect to throw myself into these problems and conflicts, and try my best to find my place, but I propose to live at peace because I will simply do my best. Life is too big a thing to be marred by little irritations, so I am merely going to try to work with My Father among my brothers without chafing and without fretting." In this spirit we start out and our ultimate success will depend upon two things: First, a cultivation of patience, without which we will be unable to keep our perspective. It is a long, long march up the hill of life, and we learn our lessons only so fast as we can assimilate truth. Before we began our service we could hear the tuning of the instruments in the orchestra; there was a twisting and stretching of the strings before they were brought to the required pitch. So in life: Our daily experiences of joy and sorrow, of success and failure, are the processes which stretch or let loose our lives so that we may make harmonious music. Some lives need more tuning than others, and sometimes it seems as if the string must break when the tension of trial is so strong.

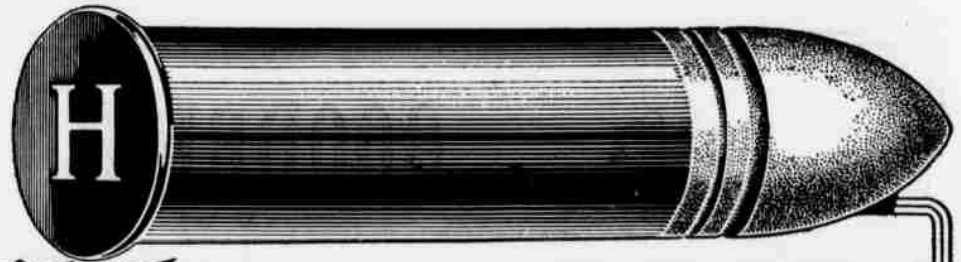
Through all the daily drudgery of our obscure experiences, when the journey is hard and lonely and there are discouragements, we must go on without becoming impatient and fussy over the little things, the slow things that try us so when we are anxious for immediate success. Little things annoy us because it is so hard for us to take in more than a small part of a great movement. The quality of manhood is bigness, the ability to see all the way and overlook the immediate discouragements. How trifling little issues seem to a man when he grasps the real meaning of movements, and while he does not neglect the little things, he does not vex himself with them because he knows they are only little. And so when the battle seems hard, when things are trying, I go out

and lift up my face to the great sky, to the stars, I lose myself in God's wonderful world of beauty and harmony, and breathe in something of eternity, and His peace comes and fills my life and I go back to my task a different man.

Many people think they are impatient because they are active; they mistake activity for fussiness. It is not the real workers who are impatient because the impatient man can never become the best workman, but when we realize the bigness of life and the dignity of service, we lose ourselves in our task and become calm in our judgments. But the Christ peace means more than the cultivation of a patient spirit. Life's relationships bring with them burden and anxiety. The peace which Christ promises is not made by emptying a little spot of all the darkness and doubt and suffering, and settling us down into it.

Nor is this peace produced by so changing our nature that we shall not feel the things that cause pain and disturbance. To do this our hearts would have to be robbed of the very qualities in them which are noblest and divinest. Only think what it would mean to you to have taken out of your life the possibility of suffering from the trials, disappointments, losses, wrongs and sorrows of life. To be made so that you would not feel these things would be to lose out of your heart the power to love and sympathize. The Christian man is left just as "human" as before. To be accurate, he is made more "human" than before because he finds his peace in realizing the depth of his humanity, his oneness with the great world of humans. And the more we give ourselves out, the more we justify our existence and find peace in service.

In the Revelation of St. John, the Divine, we have a vision of the other life, the perfect life, the life where we realize His peace. In the midst of all the glory, the praise, and the worship we are told that "they serve Him day and night in His temple." Without these words the vision would not be perfect. There could be no heaven of inglorious ease and lazy indolence. Peace can never come out of stagnation. It can only come through service. I have read that Thomas a Kempis was present in a company of friends when the conversation turned on Heaven. Each one was asked to express his highest conception of the happiness of the redeemed. One replied, "They shall see His face," another "there shall be no more pain;" when at last the question reached a Kempis, he answered "His servants shall serve Him." True peace does not come in the isolation of the hermit's cave. It does not come even when we have gotten rid of discord, the disturbing influence, though this is a necessary condition. A piano may have had the strings drawn and stretched and put in perfect tune, but it must be played, before the peace-giving strains can be heard. So in human matters a life may have been deepened and sweetened by the refining processes of trouble and adversity. But if it stops there it will only be a blank. It must fulfill the purpose for which it was made before it can have the true satisfaction and peace. The most monotonous place that could be in God's universe, whether upon earth

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